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Parents Voice Opinions on COVID-19 Regulations on Campus

Logan Gilbert and Anna Popp

While a normal year would consist of parents dropping their kids off and worrying about their first year away from home, the 2020-21 academic year has added stressors due to the danger of a global pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has uprooted life on campus at Seattle University for nearly eight months. As students adapt to their new environment and living conditions, parents have been keeping in touch with one another through the Seattle U parents Facebook page, run by the university.

With dozens of posts each week, parents are informing each other about the experiences and challenges they face with their children both on and off campus. As regulations and updates occur weekly, parents are helping their children troubleshoot newfound changes and difficulties during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Along with these changes comes inevitable support, criticism and confusion.

Some parents, like June Callasan, think that the guidelines and restrictions the school put in place are important to keeping students safe. For her, the loss of a normal school year, while unfortunate, was outweighed by the current situation with the pandemic.

"My first priority is I want to ensure that she is safe...on top of all the struggles that a parent normally faces when sending kids to school, we have this pandemic," June Callasan said. "I've read up a lot about what Seattle U is doing, I've looked at the data from King county and as a nurse, I think that they are doing a good job."

Veronica Holt, mother of a second-year student living on-campus, shared her experience with her daughter while she navigates living in a dorm alone. Holt, like some other parents on the Facebook page, expressed disappointment towards the university's handling of the mental component of COVID-19 regulations. She is appreciative and understanding of the physical regulations, but worries for the mental health of students like her daughter.

Holt is particularly concerned about new Cherry Street dining regulations, where students are only allowed to sit one-per-table and pairs are only allowed with roommates. Since her daughter does not have a roommate, Holt feels she is now more isolated.

"The concern for me and my daughter, which is also the same concern from other parents, is the mental component of truly now being in the room, and not leaving to go get a meal," Holt said. "There are ways to work around it creatively. But still, it's a shortfall."

Other parents have expressed concern about their children's safety during the pandemic, yet are confident that their kids have found a way to adapt to the changing conditions.



For parents like June Callasan, it ultimately comes down to whether or not students are able to follow school social distancing rules, along with precautions recommended by the CDC such as hand-washing and mask-wearing.

"I'm not worried about her socially, she has been able to make friends," June Callasan said. "It's important for her to make those smart choices about what people are doing, but I think with the rules the school has—and her own judgment—I am not too worried."

When addressing winter quarter, Holt expressed that their family will consider whether or not students should return to a life of isolation on campus. Holt shared that there have been discussions on the Facebook page, where parents have questioned if their children should return as well.

"For winter quarter, I would like [the Center for Community Engagement] to really put a concerted effort towards social activities for these kids," Holt said. "I haven't seen that attempt. I'd like to see a concentrated attempt to provide for them beyond physical safety."

In an attempt to address these differences in opinion, Alvin Sturdivant, the vice president of student development, spoke to how the university is trying to balance a situation that has killed upwards of 200,000 Americans—while still considering the needs of the students that have been entrusted to Seattle U.

With eight confirmed cases of COVID-19 at Seattle U, some parents think that the school is being too cautious with what kids can and cannot do, which might come at the cost of important socializing during a transition period.

"We have [parents] that are supportive of the measures that we are taking," Sturdivant said. "But we have some that think that with the case numbers we have, we are being too cautious and we should be providing students with more opportunities for in-person programming. We are going to keep following the state guidelines and be careful, because our community could be at stake."

For students, the method of making friends and socializing has been extremely different from the norm. With most students having never met the majority of their classmates or RA's this year, many have turned to the digital world instead.

For Juliana Callasan, a first-year nursing major and the daughter of June Callasan, apps like Instagram have made all the difference during an isolated introduction to college.

"I was worried about getting to know people, but because of social media like Instagram, it hasn't been too hard," Juliana Callasan said. "That's how I look up people in my class and how I've made friends so far, and it's worked out pretty well."

Virtual interaction cannot replace normal social interaction for everyone, though, and with the policies Seattle U has put in place, socialization can be difficult.

Holt feels that the comments from parents are not being addressed consistently, and has urged the university to create suggestion boxes on their website for students and parents to give feedback.

As of right now, she feels they are not efficiently addressing concerns from parents or students.

"It's just unfortunate. I'm sure they've done some great work behind all this, but it clearly isn't enough," Holt said.

Seattle U held multiple online forums over the summer in an attempt to inform parents and students on what they could expect the coming academic year to look like. According to Sturdivant, these forums have been the primary way in which the university has communicated all impacted parties of potential changes.

In conversations about concerns for student development, he recommended that parents work with the school to prioritize everyone's safety.

"Sending students to campus with the hope that things will open up...isn't the best way to approach this," Sturdivant said. "While our hope is we will be able to open up, if we aren't able to, then pushing us to open because students are experiencing difficulty isn't the way. It is working with us to maintain safety."

Some students, however, have been found breaking Seattle U protocols in order to spend time with their newfound college friends.

"I think that [the school] is doing enough to keep us safe," Juliana Callasan said. "It's up to students to follow the rules that they have set up and I would say that they aren't really doing that. My friends still go out pretty often, and I see people on social media meeting up in dorms."

Another parent, who is a part of the Facebook page, expressed both her praise and frustration with learning online at Seattle U this quarter. Karin Davies is appreciative of the majority of professors that are positively adjusting courses online and increasing communication between students. However, she is disappointed in the professors that seem to provide less-than-ideal environments for students.

"Opportunities for students to learn and ask questions are seriously compromised by professors failing to answer students' emails, canceling office hours, leaving students with no opportunity to get the guidance they need to finish work and shutting down Zoom immediately at the end of a class so students cannot ask additional questions," Davies said via an emailed statement.

While the online format is working well for her daughter, Davies feels that the Zoom format already provides less opportunities for students to ask questions. That, coupled with professors' lacking communication, poses added difficulty to the entire collegiate learning experience.

"This is hard. But it doesn't have to be this hard. It's too easy now for professors to limit students' access. And some have chosen to do that," Davies wrote.

As students continue to trudge through a constantly changing academic environment, parents continue to worry about their needs in relation to both academics and health. With debates online about how safe is too safe and what is sacrificed for the sake of caution, the impact of decisions made by Seattle U are currently not clear. One thing that remains certain, global pandemic or not, however, is that parents care deeply about their children.